



**Rally 2010 Speech by: Rand Wentworth, Alliance President
Welcoming Dinner | Sunday, October 3, 2010 | Hartford, CT**

Welcome. What an extraordinary gathering! In this room tonight, we have ranchers from Wyoming; urban gardeners from New York City; and hundreds of board members from volunteer-led land trusts here in New England—the birthplace of the land trust movement. In Connecticut alone there are 128 land trusts—practically one for every town—and most of these are run entirely by volunteers. In fact, half of the land trusts in America are volunteer-run, and they are doing wonderful work. They know their neighbors and play a vital role in the lives of their communities.

Take one example, the Redding Land Trust, here in Connecticut, has protected 53 conservation easements and 125 preserves and 60 miles of trails—a total of 1,600 acres of woods and meadows. Now this may seem small for those of you from the West where a single easement is over 1,600 acres.

A Texas rancher once visited a farmer in Vermont, both members of their local land trusts. The farmer showed the Texan the boundaries of the conservation easement that ran from his stone wall to the maple tree and all the way to his neighbor's apple orchard. The Texan responded, "You could get in my car and drive all day and not get to the other side of my easement." The farmer paused for a moment and said, "I used to have a car like that."

Large or small, east or west, rural or urban: we are drawn together by a common commitment to protecting the places that give meaning to our lives.

Tonight we are going to talk about the link between those places and human health, but first I'd like to tell you a story of one of my heroes.

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in Hartford on April 26, 1822 into the family of a prosperous and well-respected dry goods merchant. Olmsted had blue eyes, a large forehead, a solid build and unkempt hair. His attitude of calm thoughtfulness veiled an iron will and prodigious energy. He had the rare ability to look far ahead and plan for the future. All of these qualities could have led to a successful business career like his father, but fate had other plans.

His mother died when he was four, and he was sent away to school. He was admitted to Yale, but had to drop out when he got poison sumac in his eyes. He tried being an apprentice in a New York business, but quit after a year. He tried sailing to China, thinking that it would be good for his health, but contracted typhoid and returned home sea sick and emaciated. He tried farming, but could not make it financially.

Sometimes life takes us on a path of relentless disappointments just to get us exactly where we belong.

In 1850, Olmsted took a six-month walk through England and was amazed by the public parks, landscapes and gardens. He wrote about his observations to a newspaper back in America and found that he enjoyed writing. When he returned home, he toured the South and wrote articles calling for the abolition of slavery. Although he had little experience, he and his partner, Calvert Vaux, won the competition to design Central Park. His work was interrupted many times by New York politics and the Civil War, but Central Park became his masterpiece and a model of the power of parks to transform a city.

Olmsted was the Michelangelo of landscape design, and he was a genius in using light and shadows to create the emotional impact of wild nature. In fact, much of what we take to be natural in Central Park was actually conceived and built by Olmsted.

After Central Park, Olmsted designed more than 100 public parks including the U.S. Capital Grounds, Boston's Emerald Necklace and parks in Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, Montreal, Louisville, and many others.

Long before "nature deficit disorder," Olmsted understood the health benefits of contact with nature. In an era before germ theory, he observed that those who could escape the crowds and stench of the city were less likely to contract cholera, typhoid, yellow fever and malaria. He believed that the working poor in the city should have the same access to nature as the rich, who could escape to their summer residences in the Catskills and Adirondacks. He saw access to the healing power of nature as a fundamental human right.

Today, people don't worry about yellow fever or cholera, but we have an epidemic that could prove even more deadly. Let's look at a few public health trends:

- Childhood obesity has doubled for preschool children and more than tripled for adolescents.
- There are four times as many overweight children.
- Diabetes has increased for children, and skyrocketed for the general population.
- 4.5 million children were diagnosed with ADHD in 2006.
- The number of children receiving antidepressants grew from 1 million to 5.5 million in 15 years.
- We used to worry that children watched too much TV – now 28 hours per week according to Nielson.
- When you add computers, video games and iphones children now spend 53 hours per week managing technology. In 10 years, this grew from 7-1/2 to 10-3/4 hours per day.
- At the same time, children are spending less than half as much time outdoors as their parents.

It's impossible to isolate any one cause for these public health trends, and the toxic food environment is certainly a major factor. But scientific studies are now documenting what

any parent with common sense has known for ages: getting kids outside and active is good for them.

Being active outdoors:

- Improves weight control and physical strength
- Improves problem-solving skills and classroom performance
- Helps children cope with stress
- Increases self reliance
- Decreases aggressive behavior
- People who have exposure to nature heal faster after surgery

The most exciting new research shows a link between being physically active and brain development in children. Using MRI scans, scientists have shown that there is a correlation between regular aerobic exercise and higher IQ. Fit children have larger basal ganglia, (the part of the brain that controls the ability to pay attention) and a larger hippocampus (the part of the brain that controls complex memory.)

None of this should be a great surprise, really. If you think about it, our ancestors spent their days walking, hunting and gathering under the open sky. To survive, they had to be keen observers of the plants and animals of the natural world. We still live in their bodies, but we are cut off from our relationship with the community of life. No wonder people are sick, anxious, and depressed! The root of anxiety is believing that you are somehow separate from the world. But, when we are in nature, the songs of frogs, birds and crickets all remind us that we belong. Ecology, after all, is Greek for the study of home, and by conserving land we are helping people find their way to their true home. As T.S. Eliot said, “The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

To live whole and healthy lives, people need to have access to parks, trails and natural areas in their daily lives, and land trusts all over the country are opening their preserves to public use. Here in Connecticut, the New Haven Land Trust expanded its mission to include environmental education and guided nature walks. The Aspetuck Land Trust recently opened a playground made of all-natural materials with special places for children to dig holes, stack sticks and build forts.

Looking to the future, our success will depend on public support in a changing America. By 2042, the majority of Americans will be descended from someplace other than northern Europe, and America’s voters and elected officials will look very different than they do today. We can not expect them to vote for conservation if they perceive land trusts as protecting the backyards of privileged white people. Why should they care about us if they think we do not care about them? Our future depends on building authentic relationships with our new neighbors and evolving our programs to serve their communities. Land trusts must be seen as essential to the future of America—allies for good jobs, education, housing, and, perhaps most important, community health.

Everybody wants their families to be healthy, and this could be the perfect bridge between land trusts and a changing America. We have already seen that Hispanics and African Americans vote for clean water and land conservation at a higher percentage than Caucasians, and we can strengthen that alliance by communicating the connection between land conservation and human health: clean and safe drinking water; fresh local food; clean air; and places for children to play.

If we hope to build healthy communities in the midst of a difficult economy, we will need to work together on three key strategies:

- 1) Preserve public trust
- 2) Ensure permanence
- 3) Build political support

PUBLIC TRUST

To attract new funding for conservation, we must first have public trust. (A bad headline from a distant state could quickly damage the reputations of land trusts all over the country.) I'd like to thank all of you here at Rally for building your skills and the quality of your conservation work, and the 1,200 member land trusts that have formally adopted *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. To help you with your work, the Alliance has created an amazing online resource called The Learning Center, with hundreds of model documents and our entire 15-course curriculum.

Tomorrow morning we will celebrate the first 106 groups to achieve accreditation. By the time the current applicants finish the review process, 54 percent of the conservation land in America will be held by an accredited land trust, and within five years, that will grow to 70 percent. The first land trust to get accredited here in Connecticut is the Salem Land Trust, a volunteer-led organization that was founded in 1999. They own 190 acres of preserves that are open to the public and hold easements on another 232 acres on private land. I recognize that accreditation is not for everyone, and we want to help and encourage land trust members of all sizes. To address this concern, we will ask your advice about the need for a recognition program for those groups that are not eligible for accreditation.

PERMANENCE

Many land trusts are concerned about the rise in legal challenges to conservation easements, and you asked the Alliance to help. No land trust should have to stand alone in facing a well-funded adversary in court, so we have designed a conservation defense insurance program that would fund the legal costs of defending conservation lands. After just 14 months, land trusts have committed 17,750 properties to the program—68 percent of easements held by land trusts (not counting those that can self-insure). The Alliance will need to raise the \$4 million in capitalization required by the insurance regulators, and I am hopeful that we will have this service available by the end of 2012.

BUILD POLITICAL SUPPORT

To build political support, we will have to make a case why land conservation is essential to the future of America. By working together, we can build public support for the great work land trusts are doing. To help, the Alliance will be developing messages that you can use in your local papers, editorials, websites and blogs. Every five years, the Land Trust Alliance conducts a census of land trust progress and this has proven to be a powerful way to get national media attention. The last census made the front page of *USA Today*, so please fill out the census form when it arrives early next year.

The sum of all of our relationships with Congress has real power, and together we have proven that we can get things done. We were twice able to convince Congress to pass expanded tax incentives, and, with your help, we now have 264 co-sponsors for the bill to make those expanded tax incentives a permanent part of the tax code.

This campaign season is the perfect time to call your congressional representatives and arrange a visit while they are home. Introduce yourself and tell them how much renewing the tax incentive would mean to your area. Congress will need to handle many tax issues in the lame duck session, and no one knows exactly how it will turn out. But, even in the confusion, we have a chance of getting the easement incentive passed, and we have bipartisan allies to help shape the estate tax to encourage conservation. In addition, we will need your help this fall to push for full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and an amendment that would make these funds available for land trusts to purchase easements and properties. And, next year, we will be working intensively to expand funding for conservation in the Farm Bill.

At a recent business conference, Warren Buffet said “I am a huge bull on this country...I see business coming back across the board.” While recovery may take some time, America is tough and resilient, and I am “huge bull” on the future of land trusts.

We are at a pivotal time in the history of land conservation. Our country will add 100 million in population by 2050, and America needs land trusts to protect the places people cherish. For land trusts to be successful, they will need to be respected institutions that enjoy wide public trust and support. Although each land trust is independent and local—which is the great strength of our movement—we need to show the public that we are united in our commitment to integrity and excellence. By working together, we can build political support, preserve public trust and ensure the permanence of conservation.

When Olmsted was commissioned to design the landscape for Biltmore, the Vanderbilt estate in Asheville, North Carolina, the land was heavily eroded cotton fields. He told Vanderbilt that neither of them would live to see the landscape they were restoring. He was looking ahead. In his final park report, Olmsted quoted the 19th century author, John Ruskin: “Let it not be for present delight, nor for the present use alone; let it be such work as our descendents will thank us: ‘See! This our fathers did for us.’” And so it is for land trusts: we in this room will never see the ultimate benefit of our work, but it will be measured in clean water, natural beauty and improved health for children for centuries to come.

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